

Uncanny Things by Eldritch_Knight_011

Category: Stranger Things (TV 2016)

Genre: Angst, Emo/Sad Mike, Eventual Mileven So Sweet It'll Give You Diabetes, F/M, Fluff, Fluff and Angst, Hurt/Comfort, Max & El Are Hard Rock Guitar Goddesses Because I Say So, Mom Steve, No It Isn't Another Goddamn 'IT' Crossover, Where's Season 3?, superhero au, superpower au

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Characters: Dustin Henderson, Eleven (Stranger Things), Jim "Chief" Hopper, Jonathan Byers, Joyce Byers, Lucas Sinclair, Maxine "Max" Mayfield, Mike Wheeler, Nancy Wheeler, Steve Harrington, Will Byers

Relationships: Eleven/Mike Wheeler, Jonathan Byers/Nancy Wheeler, Joyce Byers/Jim "Chief" Hopper, Maxine "Max" Mayfield/Lucas Sinclair

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Summary:

Best Friends and Hawkins Middle's fiercest badasses 'Hell-eleanor' Hopper and 'Mad Max' Mayfield meet the AV club, who have some "strange" powers.

Major Mileven with smatterings of Lumax, Jopper and Jancy. M for Cursing, Underage Smoking/Drinking and depictions of violence and gore, maybe smut if you really want it.

Mild Angst to start, but I plan to ratchet up the levels of angst asap, as well as slow burn sickly sweet fluff.

1. Issue #1

Author's Note:

Just to clarify, they're all about 14 unless stated otherwise, so if underage smoking n drinking bothers you, maybe avoid?

The cuts on Mike Wheeler's hands stung like hell, and he was pretty sure he could feel a bruise coming up where that mouth breather Troy had bust his face open. He fought the urge to scratch at the wounds through the bandages covering his hands as best as he could, but there wasn't much in the detention room to distract him from the irritation. He glanced around the room to see his fellow detainees. Two seats away from him sat Will Byers, a frail looking boy with worn clothes and a shaggy bowl cut. Mike had known Will since kindergarten, and the two had been nigh on inseparable ever since. Despite Will's slight frame and weak appearance, his natural warmth and gentle demeanour meant that Mike regarded him as one of his closest friends. Three seats behind him was Lucas Sinclair, a boy with hard eyes who took no shit from anyone. Plainly dressed and with close cut hair, Lucas didn't really look out of the ordinary, however his dark skin sometimes drew unwanted attention from the town's resident racists. Lucas had moved down the street from Mike just after he and Will had become friends. The three quickly bonded over comic books and all became fast friends.

It was this friendship in fact, that had landed them in detention when Lucas and Mike had gotten involved in a fight when one of the school's bullies, a spoiled asshole called Troy, had thrown a homophobic insult in Will's direction. Several unsuccessful attempts to get Troy and his crony to take the slur back lead to a fight in the corridor that ended with the 3 friends and the bullies in detention. Thankfully the principle had the oversight to put the two groups in separate rooms.

Mike sighed explosively as he waited for the detention teacher to come back from wherever he'd been summoned to, so he could get a bathroom pass to go check on his hands. He glanced back over his shoulder to see Will's face buried in a book, and Lucas asleep on his

hand with an open text book in front of him. The only notable absence in the room was Dustin Henderson, the fourth member that completed their little group affectionately named “The Party” by the four boys. He hadn’t been in school for months, the official reason being that he was confined to his home with an extreme “illness”, so Mike and the rest of the party were enlisted to bring him notes and homework. His presence was sorely missed. With a mass of curls, wide grin and twinkling eyes, Dustin’s good humour and sense of fun livened up even the dullest of rooms. His good nature and surprisingly clear judgement also cooled any heat between Mike and Lucas’ stubbornness in the rare occasion that the two clashed.

Sighing again, Mike turned to look back into his textbook sullenly, one hand holding his head up while the other half heartedly drummed on the desk. He was about to reach for his pencil to doodle in the margins of his book when the door was loudly thrown open, followed by a vexed looking Mr Bleszinski, who stood at the front of the class with his hands on his hips before pointing towards the back row of desks. The sound jolted the boys out of their reverie, Lucas quickly sitting up and wiping drool from his mouth.

“Get in here, sit down and shut up.” He growled to someone who was still out in the hallway beyond Mike’s view. “And don’t either of you even think of getting smart with me. Now, *move*.”

Mike’s eyes, which had previously been half closed in boredom widened in surprise (and a little fear) when not one, but two people walked in. Clad entirely in black leather, ripped jeans and eye shadow, Maxine Mayfield and Eleanor Hopper sauntered into the room, glaring at Bleszinski out of the corner of their eyes. Known to their peers as Mad Max and Hell-eleanor, the two girls had a fierce reputation for raising hell and not giving a shit what anyone had to say about it, one that was known to practically everyone in the school. Fights and vandalism were pretty common, and it was a widely accepted rule that you didn’t mess with the duo. As the two walked past Mike, he got a nose full of cigarette smoke and something that smelled suspiciously like gasoline. As the two took their seats, Mike glanced over at Will and Lucas, who looked back at him with mixed expressions. Will looked thoroughly unsurprised while Lucas looked at him as if to say, “Holy shit!”. With everyone

settled, Bleszinski cleared his throat to get everyone's attention.

"Alright, I gotta step out for a few minutes, ten at the most. You *will* all still be here when I come back. Understand?" Mike, Lucas and Will nodded silently, while Bleszinski only narrowed his eyes.

"Mayfield! Hopper!" he barked as Mike did his best to resist the urge to look over his shoulder at the two girls. "Am I clear?"

The girls mumbled a response that only prompted Mr Bleszinski to scowl and raise his hand to his ear. "I'm sorry, I didn't catch that. I said, am I clear?"

This time, an audibly reluctant chorus of "Yes, Mr Bleszinski" could be heard. Looking somewhat satisfied, the teacher turned on his heel and strode out of the classroom, closing the door behind him. Barely a second later, Max half shouted "Shit head!" at the now out-of-earshot Mr Bleszinski.

Mike turned his attention back to his book, trying to desperately lose himself in the contents in the hope that it'd distract him from looking at the two at the back of the class. Rubbing the backs of his still stinging hands, he studied the equations before him. Unfortunately, the physics that usually kept his rapt attention had little to no effect at distracting him when he could feel two sets of eyes boring into the back of his head from the two somewhat incredibly scary girls behind him. He heard one murmur to the other, causing them to giggle and audibly slap the desk.

A minute later, just as Mike was feeling himself start to focus on his work, a voice from far behind them called out:

"Hey nerds, what you in for?" accompanied by barely restrained giggling. Rolling his eyes, Mike did his best to return his focus to the problem before him.

"Uh hello? Earth to planet nerd? I asked you dweebs a question." Again, Mike did his best to ignore the jeering from the two girls, anxiously twirling his pencil in between his fingers as he prayed for them to cut it out. His prayer, however, fell on deaf ears.

"I don't like it when people ignore me, Wheeler," Mike froze at the mention of his name. How the hell did they know who he was? He and his friends weren't exactly popular, far from it. Most people didn't know their names, just knew them as 'the AV club nerds' and left it at that. Why did *MadMax* and *Hell-eleanor* know his name, of all people. Oblivious to his panic, the girl continued.

"I know you can hear me, so why don't you cut it out and answer me before I come over there and make you?" Her voice hardened as she spoke until Mike was sure it could cut steel. "So I'm gonna ask you one more time; what are you in for?"

Turning slightly in his chair, Mike caught Will and Lucas' frightened gazes before looking in the girls' general direction, having deemed it safer than looking the two in the eye. Max lounged back in her chair, legs outstretched while Eleanor sat with her feet resting on the top of the desk. Both girls had dark smudges of eye shadow and worn band tees beneath leather jackets, with "The Runaways" hand painted on the backs. That's where the similarities ended however. Max's long ginger hair was held back with a red bandana, with black aviators resting atop her head. Ripped black denim jeans and worn Converse hi-tops sat below a studded belt, attesting to her reputation as a skater. Eleanor on the other hand sported a pair of scuffed black cowboy boots, spurs and all, combined with faded black jeans with rips in the knees and a bandana hanging from her belt. Her short slicked back hair barely reached beyond her jaw, and a pair of purple tinted circle shades rested low on the end of her nose. Compared with the boys' striped sweaters and plain trousers, the two girls were like something out of an MTV music video.

Swallowing loudly, Mike reluctantly piped up.

"We, uh. We got in a fight." He cringed internally at how small his voice sounded, knowing that there was no way in hell they'd take him seriously, and how utterly pathetic he sounded.

From the corner of his eye, he could see Eleanor raise her eyebrows slightly as Max guffawed loudly beside her.

"Wow, I heard that you guys like to tackle math problems head on, but you've clearly taken it to a new level." She said with a grin as she

theatrically wiped her eyes. Mike could feel himself bristle at the insult, catching the attention of Will and Lucas, who eyed him warily.

“Ha ha, very funny.” He bit back, surprising himself with the strength of this response as he turned to look at the girls properly.

Max’s face shifted into a picture of surprise as she saw the ripening bruise and cuts on Mike’s face.

“Holy shit, that must’ve been one hell of a scrape you guys were in.” she said, almost approvingly. “Who with?”

“Troy and one of his buddies.” He said simply, eyes narrowed. Still bristling from the nerd joke, he began to turn away from the pair.

“Wait wait wait!” Max gasped, leaning forward in her chair, eyes twinkling with disbelief. “We saw Troy and his buddy all busted up earlier. That was you guys?” Mike nodded stiffly.

“No shit.” She said leaning back, grinning in astonishment, looking at the three of them in turn. Mike could see Eleanor looking at him, head tilted as if she was studying him, face unreadable. This left Mike taken aback slightly, wondering as to why the two biggest hell raisers in the school were suddenly taking such an interest them. The thought made him more than a little uncomfortable, though he wasn’t sure why.

“So what’d he do?” Max questioned, pulling him back to the conversation.

“Huh?”

“Troy, dweeb. What’d he do? I mean, you must’ve had a reason. I mean, everyone knows that you AV Club nerds are weak as shit and don’t have it in you to start anything, so what’d he do?”

Mike bristled further. Seething, he turned to look Max in the eye, one hand gripping the back of his chair so tight he could feel the gashes split open again. Suppressing a grimace of pain, he focused on Max.

“Troy was talking shit about Will to his face, so Lucas and I told him to take it back.” He said with as much ice as he could. “He wouldn’t

so things got a little ‘out of hand’.” He finished sarcastically, before turning back round to study his text book. However, two growing spots of red on the back of his hand caught his eye. Cursing under his breath he stood up abruptly and strode out of the room, holding his now bleeding hand to his chest as he left for the bathroom.

Curious, El thought as Mike walked angrily out of the room. *These nerds are full of surprises.*

“Okaaaay.” Max said slowly from beside her. “That was ... unexpected.”

Shifting her gaze to the remaining two boys in the room, her friend called out to them.

“It’s Sinclair, right?”

“Yeah.” Came the eventual response as the boy turned in his chair slightly to acknowledge the girls.

“So come on, gimme the details, man!”

“Details?” the boy replied, confusion evident on his face.

“Yes, the details.” Max sighed, exasperated. “Like, which one of you broke Troy’s nose?” she finished eagerly, the corner of her mouth twisting up into a smile.

Sinclair shifted in his chair, clearly unsure if he should respond for a few seconds before a small voice coming from the front of the class answered.

“Mike. It was Mike.” The girls turned to see the small shape of Will Byers looking at them. El felt her eyebrows raise and her mouth drop open slightly, not only at the surprise of who answered, but also the little revelation he delivered. She quickly closed it however once little Will Byers focused his gaze on her with a look so intense it

almost made her squirm. It wasn't that he was looking at her, more like he was looking *through* her, as if he could see inside her soul and read her every thought. Feeling her skin crawl, she pushed her violet shades in place as if to try and block his view. Max let out a low whistle, impressed.

"Wow, remind me to shake his hand later." She said with a laugh. "Didn't think he had it in him."

Sinclair's face twisted in annoyance at the comment. Turning to look at Max, his gaze hardened.

"So what about you two?"

"What about us?" She replied.

"What did you two do to end up here?"

"Oh, that." Max smirked. "We got caught smoking by the principle."

Sinclair snorted, rolling his eyes. "No surprises there."

Max glared at him. "Except we were putting them out on the hood of his car, which is how we got caught."

His jaw dropped at this, causing Max to grin in triumph. He moved to say something but was cut off when the door swung open and Mr Bleszinski strode fiercely into the room, a scowl still on his face.

"Quiet! You still have another 15 minutes and I have tests to grade, so I don't wanna hear another sound!" He sat down at his desk, eyes moving from student to student before settling on Mike's empty seat.

"Byers!" He barked. "Where's Wheeler?"

"He uh, had to go the bathroom." Satisfied, he sighed loudly before shifting his focus to the pile of papers before him. A few minutes passed before the door opened quietly and Mike Wheeler slipped into the room. He murmured an apology to Bleszinski who waved him back to his chair without looking up from his papers. As Wheeler quietly sat down at his desk, El noted that the bandages on his hands were clean of blood. She didn't mention it or point it out, just

watched as he resumed his work without a word or a glance to his friends.

Max leaned over to whisper in El's ear.

"So, what do you think of President Nerd?"

El turned to look at her, one eyebrow raised as if to say 'what?'. Max theatrically rolled her eyes at her, mock exasperation on her face.

"I mean, *come on*. We just found out that Mike Wheeler is in detention for breaking Troy's nose in a full-on fist fight. *Mike Wheeler*. That's some crazy shit, right?" El nodded, tilting her head to show her agreement. Max leaned back in her chair considering the boys in front of them. Tilting her head towards El again, she started whispering again.

"Maybe there's more to these nerds than we thought, huh?"

Eleanor didn't respond, just wordlessly looked at the boy five rows in front of her. *Perhaps there is more to these guys*, she thought. She was brought out of her thoughts a few minutes later by Mr Bleszinski clearing his throat.

"Alright, you're done, get outta here. I don't wanna see you boys back, you hear?" Mike, Will and Lucas murmured an agreement as they packed their things away. Max jumped to her feet grinning, fists in the air.

"Let's rock n' roll!" she cried as she strode down the class and out the door, El close behind. The moment they were out the door El felt herself relax. She rolled her shoulders and shook her arms to loosen the muscles as the two made their way outside. Leaning against a wall, Max took out a pack of cigarettes and passed one to El before placing one in her own mouth. Putting the pack back in her pocket Max clicked her fingers a few times, each time sparks flew from between her finger tips. She cursed under her breath with each attempt until she managed to nurse one into a small flame that burned at the end of her index finger, but she showed no sign of pain. Instead she brought the finger to the end of her cigarette to light it, before lighting El's. As she inhaled she felt the smoke fill her lungs

with the slight burn that always accompanied it. Truth be told, El hated it. She hated the taste, the smell, and the way it burned her throat, but they helped Max manage her stress, and she was desperate for El to do it with her so she wouldn't feel as uncomfortable with it, so of course she'd agreed. They'd been through too much together and were too close for El to refuse her best friend. As Max exhaled she shook her hand, putting out the flame that was dancing on her finger tip. The two stood side by side, Max's arm around her best friend's shoulders, enjoying the comfortable silence.

"I'm sorry for getting you in detention again, El." Max apologized quietly. The other girl just shrugged as if it say 'its ok'. She didn't mind one bit, and it wasn't the worst thing they'd ever been caught doing anyway. The two finished their cigarettes before starting the long walk back to the small cabin El shared with her father that was tucked away in the woods.

They'd been walking for about half an hour when Max suddenly stopped and put a hand on El's arm.

"Hear that?" she hissed. El froze as she strained her ears in an attempt to pick out what Max had heard. All she heard was the gentle summer breeze stirring the trees, rustling the leaves. She was about to question her friend before she heard it: voices, boys' voices. The two of them turned to look down the road to see none other than the trio of boys from detention on their bikes cycling towards the edge of the wood.

"What the Hell are they doing here?" Max hissed. "This road is normally dead, so why are they here, of all people?"

El had no answer. She was just as confused as Max. While it was true that this road was normally unused except for her dad's car, it was more surprising that they should encounter the boys somewhere unexpected twice in the same day. As she watched the boys from further up the road, her brow furrowed in confusion as the boys dismounted their bikes before warily looking around and heading deeper into the woods, glancing back over their shoulders as they went.

"Is it just me, or are they up to something?" Max asked, glancing at El, who hummed in agreement.

"I don't think they saw us. Wanna go see what has them so sketchy?" She asked. This time El just locked eyes with her best friend and nodded her agreement. After the conversation at detention, El had decided she wanted to know more about the Hawkins Middle AV Club, especially Wheeler. Something about him intrigued her, set him apart from the others. Something about his eyes. The way they'd looked when he'd gotten annoyed at Max earlier, and how different they looked when he returned. The two wordlessly set off to follow the boys at a discreet distance determined to find out what the AV club were really up to.

"Holy shit, I still can't believe that happened!" Lucas exclaimed as the trio walked their bikes through the woods to their clubhouse. Mike looked at him, confused.

"Which part, the fight? Cause my face can assure you that it did happen, Lucas." He replied, somewhat dryly.

"Not that part, duh! The part where we talked to Mad Max and Hopper." He said, placing emphasis on the names. "That shit never happens!"

"They were probably just bored, I mean why else would they talk to us?"

"I don't know, man!" Lucas cried, waving his hands in the air. "It just doesn't make any sense." His eyes suddenly widened with shock and fear. "What if they were deciding if we were worth mugging?"

Mike rolled his eyes and snorted at his friend's outburst. "That's ridiculous, there's no way." Lucas made to respond but Mike cut him off. "But if you're so worried about what they were thinking, why don't you just ask Will?"

Will, who had been silent up until now, suddenly grew uncomfortable now that Mike had put all the focus onto him. Giving an uneasy smile, he felt himself somehow shrink even further into himself under Lucas' expectant gaze.

"So?" Lucas pushed. "Did you get anything?" Will looked over to Mike for help, only to see that he shared Lucas' expectant expression. Sighing, he looked down at the ground as they walked. Eventually he gave a response, voice full of uncertainty.

"Not totally, but what I got didn't mean anything bad." He shrugged before looking back up at Lucas.

"They don't wanna mug us," he said with a gentle smile, though Mike couldn't help but notice a sadness in it that worried him. "I'm not totally sure, but it seemed like they were just bored and surprised to see us." Lucas' face dropped in a mix of relief and disappointment. Returning his eyes to the ground he continued.

"Although," Lucas' head snapped back to look at him, and Will could feel Mike's eyes on him too, waiting for him to continue. "I didn't get a clear enough look, so I'm not sure I've got this totally right, but I felt a lot of interest going Mike's way from them, especially from Eleanor."

Concern too, he thought, though he didn't dare say it aloud in case he was wrong. Mike made a confused face, matched by Lucas who pushed further. "Interest? What kind of interest?"

Will shrunk again. "I don't know, just interest. Like, he intrigued them? I can't say for sure, I wasn't in a position to get a proper reading." Lucas huffed slightly but didn't push any further. Will was right, he was wrong to expect him to have been able to know their every thought from across the room. Will glanced back at Mike to see him looking down, brow furrowed in concentration, clearly deep in thought. It worried him. It worried the rest of the party, actually. Mike hadn't been himself for a while, he'd been quieter than usual and somehow gathered a lot of unexplained bruises that he wouldn't talk about. He tried to brush it all off, but the others had noticed and were trying to work out a way to get him to talk about it. Lucas wanted to be flat out with him and get it over with, whereas Will

argued not to push him and to work out a gentler way of bringing it up. Dustin was just frustrated that he couldn't be around to support Mike as the others could due to his 'illness'. Truth be told, it was a difficult situation that was stressing them all out.

They continued walking in silence until they eventually arrived at their destination – a small house that sat in a clearing in the woods. It was modest – simple wood and plaster walls, plain curtains behind a couple of small windows and smoke rising from a small chimney. They'd barely made it halfway through the clearing before the door flew open and a very large, hairy individual came running out of it towards the boys.

It was nearly seven feet tall, with long hair sprouting from nearly every inch of skin, with only a small patch showing in the middle of its face. It had long nails, almost claws sprouting from its fingers, and several sharp teeth jutting from its mouth, which was pulled into an exuberant grin.

"Holy shit, guys what took you so long?" it exclaimed as it pulled the trio into a hug. The boys returned the hairy thing's embrace laughing. Lucas managed to pull his face out of its fur to answer him.

"Sorry, man, we got detention." The creature's face broke into an awestruck look.

"No way, what for?"

Mike pulled away and straightened himself as he replied.

"We uh, kinda got in a fight with-"

Suddenly a loud, very aggressive shout cut him off.

"What the fuck is that thing?!"

Upon hearing the shout, the boys all froze, eyes wide with fear. They slowly turned around to see none other than Mad Max Mayfield and Hell-eonor Hopper standing at the edge of the clearing, faces twisted into a look of fear and anger, arms poised, ready to fight. The boys weren't sure what was scarier, the fact that they'd been followed by Mad Max and Hell-eonor, that Mad Max's forearms were on fire and

Eleanor had several large rocks floating in the air around her, or that they both looked like they were ready to kill them.

2. Issue #2 - It's a God-Awful Small Affair

Summary for the Chapter:

Direct continuation from Issue #1. The Two sides face off, with unexpected results.

Notes for the Chapter:

Ok, important things here - So sorry i took so long to update, but Uni has been an absolute nightmare. I need your opinion here - would you rather get more frequent but smaller updates, or longer chapters around 4k words every week or so?

Also, its set in 1984, not sure that was clear.

The tension was so thick, Eleanor Hopper swore you could've cut it with a knife. The two groups stared each other down, the Hawkins Middle AV club still wearing the shocked expressions on their faces from being discovered with whatever that *thing* was by El and her best friend Max. The two girls had followed the boys into the clearing they found themselves in after spotting the boys looking very suspicious on a quiet road. After spotting the large hairy creature run out of the shack that lay in the clearing, Max and El had both found themselves freaked out. Max had immediately ignited her arms and ran in to confront the group, leaving El to reluctantly follow. For all of Max's amazing traits, she wasn't exactly known for her great decision making, and it often meant that she jumped head first into dangerous situations, usually dragging El with her. As the boys got over their initial shock they quickly got themselves ready to fight, with Lucas Sinclair and Mike Wheeler taking a protective stance in front of the Byers boy and the hairy thing, with arms raised and bodies tensed while behind them the hairy thing growled.

"You need to leave!" Sinclair shouted, the first to break the silence. "Just turn around, go home and forget what you saw!"

El glanced over to see Max shift slightly, rolling her shoulders in a way that usually meant she was getting ready to throw a punch. *This*

is *bad*, she thought, glancing between her best friend and the group of boys in front of them. *This could get out of hand really quickly.* El licked her lips as she continued to glance back and forth, desperately trying to think of a way to diffuse the situation when Max spoke.

“I think it’s a bit too late for that, Sinclair. Whatever that thing is, it needs to be put down!”

What the hell Max?! El mentally screamed at her friend. She knew at this point that Max was just afraid, but that was definitely the worst possible thing she could’ve said. *Goddamnit.*

“We don’t wanna fight you.”

It took El a minute before she realised that the new voice came from the big hairy thing behind the boys, which took a step forward, arms raised in a calming gesture, speaking in a voice that sounded eerily similar to that of Dustin Henderson.

“Lets all just take a minute and think about this,” it continued, doing its best to ease the situation. El could see Max’s eyes widen in surprise and realization.

“*Henderson?*” she exclaimed incredulously, disbelief written all over her face as she lowered her arms a fraction. It didn’t last long however, as El watched her shake her head and raise her fists once again, the flames rising from them somewhat intensified. “It doesn’t matter,” she continued. “You know too much about us now for us to let you walk away.”

With that, her flames grew hotter, engulfing her entire arms in orange fire, her ginger hair whipping around her head, almost ablaze itself. Why the hell was Max looking for a fight? El felt herself start to panic; the boys had given them every chance to calmly talk this through, but Max had shot them down every time, and El had no idea why. Looking back at the boys, El watched Sinclair’s face twist into a scowl as he stepped forward.

“Fine then,” and with that El watched with disbelief as his skin hardened and cracked as every inch of his flesh was replaced with dark grey rock. Settling into a boxing stance, the now completely

stone Sinclair raised his fists as the boys rearranged themselves, with the Henderson creature swapping places with Mike, its arms out in a 'come at me stance', while Mike himself stood behind them guarding Byers. As El looked between the people around her, she couldn't see a way around the oncoming fight. She desperately looked from face to face, trying to find someone to reason with. Max and Sinclair had locked eyes, both scowling, Henderson seemed to be looking at El herself, letting out a growl as he crouched like a cat ready to pounce. Behind them, she saw Byers' face covered with a look of pure panic, while Mike just looked...

Sad?

El found herself momentarily distracted by the pure sadness in Mike's eyes as he raised his fists, his face a picture of pain as he resigned himself to the fight.

I know you don't want to do this. El was brought out of her reverie by a voice in her head that was not her own. *Neither of you have to do this, it doesn't have to end this way.* El felt her blood run cold as she started to panic at the foreign voice in her mind. Glancing at Max, she saw her best friend's face twisted into a look of absolute fear as she lowered her hands, taking a step back, eyes wide.

This is all a big misunderstanding, suddenly recognizing the voice, El looked back at the boys to see Will Byers staring at them, brow furrowed in concentration with fingers pressed to his temples. *We can talk this out, no one needs to get hurt.* El lowered her own hands and took a couple of steps back, trying desperately to block the voice out of her head. Looking over at Max, she saw her best friend doubled over with her hands pressed over her ears and shaking her head, trying to physically block out the voice.

"Get out get out get out." She begged, over and over and El could hear the tears in her voice, but she was too busy trying to block Byers out of her own mind to help. All her attempts were unsuccessful however, and her heart beat faster and faster as the panic grew.

Let's just all calm down and talk about this, there's no rea-

"GET OUT MY HEAD!" Max screamed, tears streaming down her

face, a look of manic terror spread across her face as she finally broke and hurled a ball of flame the size of a basketball straight at Will in a desperate attempt to silence the maddening voice in her head. Henderson and Sinclair didn't have time to react as the fire ball flew straight past them and would've destroyed Will had Mike not grabbed Will at the last second and twisted his back to them so that it hit him rather than Byers. The ball of flame impacted with an audible cracking sound that sent both boys to the ground, Mike's back black and smoking. There was a moment of silence in the clearing as every wide eye was fixed on the two boys lying in the dirt, realisation dawning on everyone present.

"What did you just do?" Sinclair demanded as he turned to look Max in the eye.

El had begun to run over to check on the two when Mike suddenly jumped to his feet to turn and look at Max, his eyes full of so much raw, furious hatred that El almost lost her balance.

Screaming, he started sprinting forward, before jumping and using Sinclair's back as a springboard to leap high into the air, still screaming with his fists raised. He flew through the air, and time seemed to slow down as El watched in horror and morbid fascination at the brutal display before her. Mike's knuckles stretched and expanded as if being pushed apart before they exploded in a shower of blood as two metallic blades forced themselves out of each hand. As he neared Max, he pulled one bloodied fist back, ready to impale her the second he landed and El did the only thing she could think of.

Throwing her hands out in front of her, she caught Mike mid-air, leaving him suspended 4 feet above the ground, and less than a meter away from Max, who stared at him wide eyed. Unable to move, Mike started making enraged animal sounds as Max fell back in the grass, her face ashen from the shock of the display before her. Snarling, the boy struggled against the invisible force that held him in suspension as those present took a collective breath and tried to work out what to do next. El glanced at the boys, uncertain on how best to proceed. She couldn't put Mike down – the boy was still snarling savagely and struggling against her grip, and he'd most certainly go for either of the girls if she did. At the same time, however, she didn't want to risk giving the other boys a reason to continue their fight. Looking back

at Max, El felt her heart drop as she saw her best friend sitting limp, her eyes wide and unfocused, clearly going into shock. El heard the sound of approaching footsteps and turned to see Dustin, Will and Lucas approaching, glancing between herself and the still restrained Mike, the three bearing different expressions. Dustin's beastly appearance made it hard for El to read his expression, while Lucas' suspicion was all too clear. Will however, looked as calm as ever as he came to stand next to her to look at Mike.

"Are you holding him ok?" He asked. El nodded a confirmation, despite feeling the strain of holding for so long begin to take effect, like a tug at the front of her mind.

Hearing the voices, Mike managed to turn his head to look at the two. He let out a growl once he put two and two together to realise that El was the one who had trapped him, but the anger began to melt when the two made eye contact. Admittedly, El was very tempted to look away, afraid of what she may have found, but again, found herself surprised by what she saw. As the anger melted away, she found a kaleidoscope of emotions take its place; Sadness, pain, shame and...

Gratitude?

She could hardly believe it herself and was sure she was reading too much into it, but at the same time she was sure that his eyes seemed to be thanking her what she did. She found herself being drawn into his dark brown eyes, and the way they seemed to speak to her, as if to say *I'm so sorry you had to do this, but thank you*. She noticed too, they longer they looked at each other, the less he struggled, his body relaxing as much as her grip allowed.

"Eleanor, do you mind lowering him a bit? Keep him still though, just for a little longer."

Lucas' voice drew her out of her thoughts and Mike's eyes as he walked in front of his friend. El complied, lowering her hands and in doing so bringing Mike to float less than an inch above the floor of the clearing. Lucas stopped and stood to face Mike, rolling his shoulders and muttering a quick "Sorry Mike," before drawing one massive stone fist back and punching his friend square across the

face, knocking him out cold. El released Mike from her hold, allowing Lucas to scoop him up off the grass and carry him back to the small cottage in the middle of the clearing. As he began his walk, El rushed over to Max, who still sat silently in the grass, eyes unfocused. El pulled her best friend into a hug as she knelt down next to her, doing her best to comfort her shaken friend. Max's only response was to lean into the hug, not looking up as Will approached. Crouching before them, he looked El in the eye, face full of apology. He found it harder than he expected to look El in the eyes: he could still see the tracks that her tears had left on her cheeks, stained black from the running mascara, the rims of her eyes bright red. As he looked into the girls' eyes he saw for the first time that they were full of fear and uncertainty. Feeling his heart fill with guilt and regret, he dropped his head in shame before murmuring an apology.

"I'm sorry I had to do that, I really am. I don't like doing it, but it was the only way to avoid an all out brawl." He said, head still bowed. "Please come inside and let us explain."

Max struggled to keep focused on what Will Byers was telling her, but her head was a whirlwind of thoughts and emotions and a voice in her head screaming that she'd tried to kill him. It wasn't the first time however, she'd been forced to kill before, but somehow this was different. Those times were self-defence, this? This would've been *murder*. The thought sent a shiver up her spine despite the warmth that her body was wrapped in. She and El were sitting on a worn-out couch in the cabin's small living room, both wrapped in blankets provided by the boys to try and coax them out of their shock. However, Max was finding it difficult to relax, given that said boys weren't all as welcoming as Will. Dustin had sprawled out on a mass of mattresses and blankets in the corner of the room, eyeing them warily in a way not dissimilar to how a pride male lion eyes a new male when trying to work out if he was a threat to his rule. Lucas, once again flesh and blood, had stationed himself by the door, arms

crossed over his chest and was glaring at Max, eyes full of suspicion. Will himself sat across from them in an old armchair, calmly assuring them that there wasn't in fact a problem when Mike suddenly woke, sitting bolt upright from where he'd been passed out on the other couch, his charred jacket on the floor next to him.

"Mike, you're awake. How do you feel?" Will asked him. Mike however, ignored him completely after noticing the girls sitting on the couch and instead jumped off the couch and bolted towards the door. As he tried to rush by, Will managed to catch his arm and tried to get his attention.

"Hey, hey, Mike its ok," he began. "Just calm down and sit with us-"

He was cut off however when Mike roughly pulled himself free and bolted though the doorway and out into the hall, before the sound of another door in the cabin slamming shut.

"Mike wait, at least let us help you-" Will started to follow him before Lucas gently stopped him and gave him a reassuring, though somewhat sad, smile.

"Let him go, Will. Leave him be."

The light in the ceiling of the cabin's dirty tiled bathroom shone cold, flickering and buzzing from the unsteady current. Mike sat on the cold, grimy seat of the toilet, looking down at his bloodied hands, which rested in his lap. A fresh roll of bandages sat next to a bottle of disinfectant on the haphazard counter next to him, though he made no move to use them. Instead, he remained motionless as tears flowed slowly down his cheeks, before falling onto his hands. He didn't react as the salty liquid burned the deep gashes in his hands from where the blades had emerged, in fact, he relished the pain. He closed his eyes and let his head fall back as his head was filled with a

thousand voices screaming at him, reminding him of all the times he'd failed: the times he'd lost his temper with his little sister Holly, the times he'd gotten angry with Lucas over nothing, and most of all the times he'd ever hurt someone. The pain was good; it was no less than he deserved, the punishment he knew he must receive. He clenched his fists and took satisfaction in the way the strain set his torn flesh on fire, gave him the pain he wanted, *needed* to feel, to pay for all his failings. He didn't hear the blood run off his hands and drip onto the tiles below, didn't feel the hot trails it left on his skin, and didn't hear the sound of feet scuffing the carpet outside the door. The gentle knock on the door, however, he did hear. Snapping his eyes open at the sound, Mike scowled, clenching his fists harder.

"I'm fine, Will, I can take care of this myself." He growled, with more venom than he intended. Standing, he turned to face away from the door and busied himself with the medical supplies before him. He heard the door open behind him slowly, softly. Whirling around, ready to throw Will back out into the hall, Mike instead found himself at a total loss for words when he was suddenly standing in front of someone entirely unexpected.

He felt his mouth drop open slightly as El Hopper closed the door behind her gently, her tear stained eyes never leaving his. Face twisted in confusion, Mike struggled to produce the words to ask her to leave, and for reasons he couldn't find, he felt himself begin to panic at the thought of this girl seeing him like this. It wasn't that she was intruding on his wallowing, more that he felt a deep shame at the thought of her discovering his nature and seeing him for what he really was; a freak, an animal. *A monster*. El took slow, cautious steps towards him as he subconsciously backed away, her deep brown eyes full of...

Concern? Worry?

This only confused Mike further. Why the hell would a girl he barely knew look this worried about him despite the fact that he had tried to kill her best friend not even an hour before. As she drew closer, Mike saw something else in her eyes, something he couldn't quite lay a finger on. Before he realised it, she was standing mere inches away from him, only noticing when he felt the shock of her skin on his as she tried to take his hands. Flinching, he shot backwards, colliding

with the counter behind him in an attempt to create distance. She took a tiny step toward him again, her watering eyes pleading with him, begging him to let her near him with so much emotion and worry that Mike suddenly turned away, afraid that the intensity would make him give in and surrender to her silent plea. He clenched his eyes shut and kept his face down, as he whispered to her.

“Go away, I can do this myself.”

The only sound he could hear was the pounding of his panicked heart hammering in his ears so loudly it drowned out the buzzing of the overhead light. So loud, he couldn't even hear himself breathe. Despite this, a tiny gentle sound made its way through the noise and made him snap his eyes open.

“Mike.”

It was the auditory equivalent of the phrase ‘blink and you'll miss it’: a sound so small and gentle that if you weren't looking for it, it would go unnoticed but for whatever reason, the word, barely a whimper shot through Mike and hit him right in his heart. Looking up, he saw El looking at him, her deep brown eyes on the verge of tears as her bottom lip trembled as another whisper fell from her lips following the first, voice hoarse from disuse.

“Please.”

One word. Just one word, a whispered plea, barely more than a sigh. Yet as it fell on his ears, he felt the weight of so much desperation, care, concern and inexplicable affection crash onto his heart with the force of a tidal wave. The room around them seemed to melt away, and suddenly it was just the two of them standing alone in a void, their eyes locked. Mike felt his eyes widen and his mouth drop as he was suddenly overcome with the strangest feeling. As she gently reached for his hands again, he didn't resist, instead overcome with the feeling that he was seeing her for the first time, *really* seeing her; beautiful brown eyes full of concern, her small button nose, her pale pink lips. The flickering light above her caught the stray hairs around her head, casting her in an almost heavenly aura. Suddenly, all the

screaming voices in his head were silenced by a single voice, his own voice, with only one word.

Pretty.

As she took his hands, El felt her chest tighten and her breath catch in her throat, praying that he didn't push her away again. He didn't, in fact he didn't move, just kept his eyes locked on hers. She broke the eye contact to look down at his hands, a lump forming in her throat again to see the vicious gashes that ran from the backs of his hands to between his fingers, still bleeding from where the blades had ripped their way out through his skin. Doing her best to swallow the lump in her throat despite how dry it was, she managed to rasp out another whisper.

"Sit."

Mike said nothing, just complied, moving backwards and returning to his place on the toilet seat. El moved with him, still delicately holding his hands in hers, careful not to disturb his wounds. Once he was seated, she gently laid his hands down onto his lap before collecting the antiseptic and bandages then kneeling in front of him. She busied herself with studying the directions on the bottle of disinfectant, despite fully knowing how to apply the liquid. She knew she didn't need to read it twice, but she couldn't bring herself to look at any of him yet. It hurt her deep inside to see his wounds, more than she expected, and she was too afraid to look into his eyes again, too afraid of how it made her feel. There was too much sadness in them, too much pain, but now after she'd spoken to him for the first time, there was something else in there too and although she couldn't identify it, it stirred something in her chest and that made her nervous. So she read the instructions on the back of the bottle again as she gathered the strength to face her task, so focused that she didn't notice that Mike hadn't taken his eyes off her, not even for a

second, his face still bearing the awestruck look from earlier. Steeling herself, El put the bottle down and gently took Mike's hands again, fighting back the tears that suddenly threatened to run down her cheeks again. Unscrewing the cap on the bottle of disinfectant, she soaked some cotton with the liquid, before holding her breath and gently dabbing it onto his wounds. She knew from experience that the stuff burned like hell, but much to her surprise Mike didn't make a sound, he didn't even flinch. Instead, El found herself wincing in his place. With each dab the wounds were cleaner, but the cotton bloodier. The two sat silently as El washed the blood away from his hands, and with no blood to hide it, she could see the gashes all too clearly. They ran so deep, she swore she could almost see his bones, the sight making her feel sick. The pale skin of his hands was red from the abuse around the wounds, the edges ragged and torn. Still keeping her eyes down, El retrieved the roll of bandages, and slowly began to wrap the soft white cotton over his hands, and between his fingers. El felt her focus start to waver as each pass around his hands caused their fingers to brush, sending shivers up and down her spine.

By the time she was finishing her task, tucking away the loose ends, she didn't know how long had passed. It could've been minutes, it could've been hours, but she didn't care. Some unknown feeling deep inside her had compelled her to put him back together, and when she finally looked back up into his eyes, that same feeling told her that it had all been worth it, no matter how long it took. Tears were rolling openly down his face, but his eyes held so much warmth in them, El found her own insides warm to see the sight. The sadness might not be gone, and neither was the pain, but El was silently thankful she was able to give him that warmth. Her happiness was short-lived, however, as Mike's shoulders began to shake, his lips trembling. And suddenly, without realizing she was doing it, El pulled him down onto the floor and into a hug as he began to sob, his body shaking as he let out small whimpering cries. El had never willingly been this close to someone before, and although the feeling of someone else's body being pressed against her usually made her panic, something about Mike's warmth relaxed her.

The two of them sat there on the cold, grimy tiles of the cabin's bathroom, El's fingers gently tracing circles on Mike's back, doing her best to comfort him as he sobbed, his body limp. Then, as if realizing

where he was, Mike wrapped his arms around El trying to pull himself closer, as he buried his face in her shoulder, his sobs intensifying. El started to stroke his back as she desperately thought of a way to try and calm him down, paying no mind to the way his tears soaked her shirt. And then, almost unconsciously, El began to sing softly as she rubbed his back and held the back of his head.

*“There's a lady who's sure all that glitters is gold
And she's buying a stairway to heaven.”*

Her voice, barely above a whisper, flowed softly from her lips as she soothed the sobbing boy. A boy whom, she realized, she hadn't met until earlier today. A boy who'd tried to kill her best friend. And yet, despite this, it felt as though it were the most natural thing in the world. As they sat there on the floor in each other's arms, El felt that strange feeling in her heart again, this time radiating a beautiful warmth throughout her body. She didn't know what it meant, but she decided she liked it.

*“In a tree by the brook, there's a songbird who sings,
Sometimes all of our thoughts are misgiven.”*

As she continued, she felt his sobs begin to soften as he calmed, but she never took her hand away from his back, nor did she stop caressing his hair with the other.

*“There's a feeling I get when I look to the west,
And my spirit is crying for leaving.”*

El felt his hands loosen on her back and drop slightly, as she noticed his breathing had evened out. Realization dawning on her, a small smile lifted the corners of her mouth as she kept singing her little

lullaby, lulling Mike Wheeler into a blissful sleep, wrapped in her arms.

“And she's buying a stairway to heaven.”

Notes for the Chapter:

Thanks for ready, Gimme love PLZ! I know its shallow to ask, but it really does help motivate me with new material. Next chapter will include the big conversation between the boys and max, and maybe MAYBE more fluff if you liked what you got.

OH, AND THE LONG AWAITED APPEARANCE OF
MOM STEVE